

Message Text

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INRE-00 USIE-00 NEAE-00 /050 W
-----007493 072025Z /41
O 071907Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6407

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FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

USIAC

E.O.11652:N/A
SUBJ: ATHERTON BACKGROUNDER

FOLLOWING IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF AMBASSADOR ATHERTON'S BACKGROUNDER
FOR THE PRESS, HELD IN CAIRO ON MARCH 6.

I DID THINK IT WOULD BE USEFUL BEFORE I GET BACK HOME TRY TO TAKE
A LOOK IN THE BROADEST SENSE OF WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE THE
DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS STAND AND THE STATUS OF THE PEACE PROCESS AS
A WHOLE AND, IF I MAY, I'LL MAKE SEVERAL OBSERVATIONS AND THEN
TAKE THE REST OF THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS.

FIRST OF ALL, I FIND IT USEFUL TO REVIEW FROM TIME TO TIME THE
PREMISES FROM WHICH OUR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS PROCEED, BECAUSE THEY
CAN'T BE EMPHASIZED TOO MUCH. FIRST OF ALL, WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE
THAT IN THE PRESENT SITUATION WE HAVE THE BEST OPPORTUNITY IN
THIRTY YEARS TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACE IN THE MIDDLE
EAST AND WE DO NOT INTEND TO MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY. THERE ARE
DIFFICULT DECISIONS THAT ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE MADE TO GIVE
CONCRETE EXPRESSION TO THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT HAVE BEEN OPENED UP
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BY PRESIDENT SADAT'S INITIATIVE. BUT AGAIN WE FEEL THE OPPORTUNITY
IS ONE THAT SIMPLY MUST NOT BE MISSED. SECONDLY THE UNITED STATES
HAS THE CONFIDENCE OF BOTH SIDES IN THE NEGOTIATION TO SERVE IN
THE MIDDLE MAN ROLE WHICH WE'RE PLAYING, WHICH I WOULD EMPHASIZE
WE SEE AS AN ACTIVE NOT A PASSIVE MIDDLE MAN ROLE. THIRDLY, OUR
OBJECTIVE REMAINS A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT IN THE AREA, AND
THE PARTIES ASSURE US THAT THIS REMAINS OBJECTIVE AS WELL. THE

IMMEDIATE VEHICLE FOR APPROACHING THAT IS THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES WHICH IS UNDER NEGOTIATION, WITH OUR HELP. WE DO NOT SEE THIS DECLARATION AS AN END IN ITSELF, BUT AS A BASIS FOR BROADENING THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND AS A STEP, AND A VERY IMPORTANT STEP, IN THE PROCESS ITSELF. LET ME EMPHASIZE AS A SECOND POINT THAT, HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO VIEW THIS AS A PROCESS. THE PROCESS IS NOW IN A NEW FRAMEWORK; IT HAS BEEN IN A NEW FRAMEWORK

,
A NEW CONTEXT, SINCE PRESIDENT SADAT'S INITIATIVE. AND THIS PROCESS HAS SEVERAL COMPONENTS. FIRST OF ALL THERE ARE MEETINGS AT THE CHIEF-OF-STATE LEVEL. THERE HAVE BEEN THE MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND PRESIDENT SADAT AND PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. THERE HAVE BEEN, OF COURSE, MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENT SADAT AND PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. THERE ARE ALSO THE MEETINGS THAT TAKE PLACE AT THE FOREIGN MINISTER LEVEL, BOTH WHEN OUR SECRETARY OF STATE MEETS WITH FOREIGN MINISTERS EITHER IN THE STATES OR ON TRIPS TO THE AREA, AND OBVIOUSLY THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE PARTIES THEMSELVES WHERE PRESENT FOR THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS IN JERUSALEM. THE CONFERENCES OF THE PARTIES, OF WHICH THE CAIRO CONFERENCE WAS BEGINNING OF THIS NEW PHASE; THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY COMMITTEES THAT FLOWED FROM THAT. THERE IS, AT THE END OF THE ROAD, STILL THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AS THE FRAME WORK AND THE OBJECTIVE OF THE EFFORT. AND FINALLY THERE ARE ONGOING DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO GIVE CONTINUITY TO THE PROCESS. THAT IS THE PRINCIPAL FOCUS OF MY MISSION AND THE POSITION THAT I HAVE BEEN APPOINTED TO. AND I WOULD EMPHASIZE THIS NEW FUTURE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BECAUSE THE PROCESS IS A CONTINUOUS ONE RATHER THAN AN EPISODIC ONE, IF I CAN PUT IT THAT WAY. WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF NEGOTIATIONS NOW AND IN ONE PHASE OF IT. AND LET ME SAY JUST A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE CURRENT PHASE THAT I HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN THESE LAST FEW WEEKS. I CONSIDER THAT THIS HAS BEEN A USEFUL ROUND OF DISCUSSIONS THAT I'VE HAD IN MY TALKS IN ISRAEL AND IN EGYPT. THE TEXT OF THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPALS IS EVOLVING; THERE IS MUCH AGREED LANGUAGE IN THE TEXT; THE DIFFERENCES HAVE BEEN NARROWED, MORE SHARPLY DEFINED. THE PRINCIPAL DIFFERENCE REMAINS AS I'VE SAID BEFORE THE PALESTINIAN LANGUAGE IN THE DECLARATION WHICH OF COURSE REFLECTS SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES IN THE POSITIONS OF THE PARTIES THEMSELVES. AND THEIR POSITIONS ARE WELL KNOWN, ON THE PUBLIC RECORD. LET ME SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT OUR VIEWS. FIRST OF ALL, ON THE PALESTINIAN ASPECT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPALS, WE HAVE FELT THAT THE LANGUAGE WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER USED WHEN HE MET WITH PRESIDENT SADAT IN ASWAN PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK FOR NEGOTIATING A JUST SOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. CONCRETE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUCH A SOLUTION, INCLUDING INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS LOOKING TOWARD AN ULTIMATE SETTLEMENT OF THE PROBLEM WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE STATUS OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA WOULD BE FOR THE PARTIES, OF COURSE, TO NEGOTIATE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK ESTABLISHED BY THE PRINCIPLES.

THE GUIDELINES FOR NEGOTIATIONS RELATING TO THE ISSUES OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA AND MORE BROADLY SPEAKING, THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IN ALL OF ITS ASPECTS, ARE ONE OF THE ITEMS ON THE AGENDA WHICH WAS AGREED FOR THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE .. THE NEXT ITEM ON THE AGENDA. AND I MIGHT SAY THAT IN THE COURSE OF MY TALKS THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS I HAVE DONE SOME PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF THIS SUBJECT AS WELL, SUPPLEMENTING THE ACTUAL NEGOTIATIONS ON THE DECLARATION. THE OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE DECLARATION; LET ME SAY A WORD ABOUT OUR VIEWS ON THESE. FIRST, WITH REGARD TO PEACE AND THE NATURE OF PEACE, WE HAVE ALWAYS FELT THAT AT THE END OF THE PROCESS, AS PART OF THE SETTLEMENT, THERE SHOULD BE AGREEMENT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NORMAL, PEACEFUL RELATIONS AND THAT THESE SHOULD BE EMBODIED IN PEACE TREATIES. SECONDLY, ON THE TERRITORIAL ASPECT, IT WAS OUR VIEW THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITHDRAWAL, AS SET FORTH IN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 242,

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INRE-00 INR-10 USIE-00 /050 W
-----007572 072027Z /42

O 071907Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6408

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FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

USIAC

APPLIES TO ALL THE FRONTS OF THE CONFLICT. AND THIRDLY, WITH REGARD TO THE QUESTION OF SECURE AND RECOGNIZED BOUNDARIES,

WE FEEL THAT THERE MUST ALSO BE DISCUSSION OF AND AGREEMENT UPON

THE KIND OF SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS THAT WOULD GIVE CONFIDENCE THAT RECOGNIZED BOUNDARIES WOULD ALSO BE SECURE BOUNDARIES, AN ISSUE WHICH IS NOT DIRECTLY DEALT WITH IN THE DECLARATION OR IN THESE NEGOTIATIONS BUT WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY VERY MUCH PART OF THE BACKDROP, OF THE ATMOSPHERE WITHIN WHICH THESE NEGOTIATIONS TAKE PLACE, THE QUESTION OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. I THINK ON THIS, OUR POSITION HAS BEEN MADE VERY CLEAR; IT'S BEEN VERY CONSISTENT AND IT REMAINS OUR POSITION. FINALLY, LET ME SAY JUST A COUPLE OF WORDS NOW ABOUT THE NEXT PHASE. FIRST OF ALL MY OWN PLANS ARE TO RETURN TO ISRAEL TONIGHT FOR A FINAL ROUND OF TALKS THERE TOMORROW. THEN I WILL, IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS, AND I HAVE NOT YET DECIDED PRECISELY ON MY TRAVEL PLANS, START BACK TO WASHINGTON IN ORDER TO BE THERE A FEW DAYS BEFORE PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S VISIT BEGINS. AS FOR THE BEGIN VISIT ITSELF, THIS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PROCESS AND A VERY IMPORTANT NEXT STEP. IT'S IMPORTANT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THE VIEWS OF THE LEADERS OF THE TWO PRINCIPAL PARTIES TO THE PRESENT NEGOTIATIONS. WE'RE NOT DEALING IN A STATIC SITUATION AND THEREFORE IT'S IMPORTANT, EVEN THOUGH PRESIDENT CARTER DID HAVE A MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IN DECEMBER, TO HAVE ANOTHER ROUND TO UPDATE THEIR RESPECTIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF EACH OTHER'S POSITIONS, SINCE, AFTER ALL, IT IS AT THE TOP WHERE THE FINAL DECISIONS ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE MADE. WE FEEL IT VERY IMPORTANT TO BE SURE WE HAVE A FULL APPRECIATION OF THE POSITIONS OF THE PARTIES AND THAT THEY ALSO HAVE A FULL UNDERSTANDING OF OUR VIEWS. PRESIDENT SADAT'S VISIT SERVED THIS PURPOSE AND WE HOPE THAT THE VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN WILL DO THE SAME. THIS IS THE IMPORTANT STEP IN MOVING TOWARD THE KIND OF CONCRETE DECISIONS WHICH I MENTIONED EARLIER, ARE GOING TO BE NEEDED IN THE WEEKS AHEAD. FINALLY, LET ME JUST SAY AGAIN AS I'VE SAID MANY TIMES BEFORE WE HAVE NO U.S. BLUE PRINT FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT; OBVIOUSLY IN THE END THE AGREEMENTS, THE TREATIES HAVE TO BE NEGOTIATED AND AGREED BY THE PARTIES THEMSELVES.

BUT WE DO ACCEPT, WE THE UNITED STATES, CERTAIN WELL ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES AS A BASIS FOR A JUST SOLUTION. FIRST OF ALL WE FEEL IT MUST BE BASED ON ALL THE PRINCIPLES OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 242, APPLICABLE TO ALL FRONTS AND ALL PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT. AND SECONDLY, THERE MUST BE A SOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IN ALL OF ITS ASPECTS, WITH PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVES PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROCESS OF DETERMINING THEIR OWN FUTURE. THE UNITED STATES IS READY TO PUT FORWARD OUR OWN IDEAS AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME, WHEN WE BELIEVE THAT THIS CAN PLAY AN EFFECTIVE ROLE IN MOVING THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS FORWARD. AN EXAMPLE RECENTLY OF THAT OF COURSE, WAS OUR EFFORT TO BREAK THE IMPASSE OVER THE AGENDA FOR THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING BEFORE IT CONVENED. I'M JUST CITING THAT THE EXAMPLE OF THE KIND OF ROLE WE PLAY WHEN WE FEEL THE TIME HAS COME TO DO SO. MY OWN FUTURE PLANS

OBVIOUSLY DEPEND UPON ON MY INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE PRESIDENT AND
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THE SECRETARY AND THIS WILL BE DISCUSSED ON MY RETURN TO WASHINGTON,
BUT MY PRESENT EXPECTATIONS ARE THAT I WILL BE COMING BACK TO THIS
AREA AGAIN AT SOME POINT AFTER MR. BEGIN'S VISIT TO FOLLOW UP AND
TO CONTINUE THE PROCESS. O.K. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR HEARING ME
OUT WHILE I SET THAT STAGE.

PERHAPS I'VE ANSWERED ALL YOUR QUESTIONS.

QUESTION: MR. ATHERTON, CAN YOU JUST TELL US ANYTHING ABOUT THE
EXCHANGE OF COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN PRESIDENT SADAT AND PRIME
MINISTER BEGIN.

ANSWER: ONLY THAT IT TOOK PLACE.

QUESTION: ANYTHING HAPPENING WITH THAT EARLIER NOTION THAT
PRESIDENT SADAT MIGHT GO TO WASHINGTON AT THE SAME TIME AS PM BEGIN.
ANY BODY WORKING ON THAT?

ANSWER: NO. THERE'S BEEN NO DISCUSSION OF THAT AT ALL.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: THERE IS NOTHING SPECIFIC ON THAT EITHER. AS YOU KNOW,
KING HUSSEIN HAS ALMOST EVERY YEAR MADE A PRIVATE VISIT TO THE
STATES AND IT'S ALWAYS BEEN COMBINED WITH AN INVITATION TO COME
TO WASHINGTON FOR A MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT AND I CERTAINLY DON'T
WANT TO SAY THAT THAT ISN'T POSSIBLE AGAIN BUT AT THE MOMENT
THERE IS NOTHING SPECIFIC WITH REGARD TO A VISIT BY KING HUSSEIN.
IN TERMS OF TIMING, IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT IS ACTIVELY BEING
FOCUSED ON AT THE MOMENT.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: I CAN'T ANSWER THAT BECAUSE I HAVEN'T EVEN HEARD THAT
SPECULATION. LET ME TELL YOU WHERE WE ARE. I HAD SENT WORD WHEN
I WAS PLANNING MY TRIP TO THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT OFFERING TO COME
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TO SIMPLY BRING THEM UP TO DATE ON THE STATUS OF THE PEACE EFFORTS

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INR-10 INRE-00 USIE-00 /050 W

-----007643 072029Z /41

O 071907Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6409

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FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

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AND I WAS TOLD I WOULD BE WELCOME TO COME TO THE KINGDOM AND THAT STILL STANDS; THE DIFFICULTY IS THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER WHO ORIGINALLY HAD PLANNED TO BE BACK FROM EUROPE, WHERE HE NOW IS, IS NOT YET BACK FROM EUROPE, AND THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT HE WILL BE ABLE TO WORK SOMETHING OUT IS REALLY STILL OPEN. I'M STILL IN COMMUNICATION THROUGH OUR EMBASSY IN JIDDA WITH THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT ABOUT TRYING TO WORK SOMETHING OUT. THEY HAVE SAID COME AHEAD, BUT SINCE I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT AND I THINK LOGICAL THAT IT WOULD BE REALLY MORE IMPORTANT FOR ME TO GO WHEN I CAN SEE THE FOREIGN MINISTER...

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: QUITE HONESTLY, WE LIVE FROM DAY TO DAY IN THIS MISSION AND PLANS CHANGE AND SOME TIMES AT THE VERY LAST MINUTE. FORTUNATELY, I HAVE MY OWN TRANSPORTATION SO I CAN ALTER MY ITINERARY ON SHORT NOTICE, AND SO, I DON'T EVEN WANT TO SAY THAT AT THIS POINT. I JUST DON'T KNOW YET.

QUESTION: YOU SAY YOU EXPECT TO BE BACK IN THE AREA, MR. ATHERTON,
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AFTER YOUR TALKS WITH MR. BEGIN, DOES THIS MEAN, THEN THAT YOU DON'T EXPECT AN AGREEMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE ON A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

ANSWER: I WOULDN'T SAY THAT. OBVIOUSLY WE ARE GOING TO CONTINUE WORKING TOWARDS AS EARLY AN AGREEMENT AS POSSIBLE ON THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AND IT WILL CERTAINLY BE ONE OF THE SUBJECTS ON THE AGENDA IN WASHINGTON, BUT EVEN IF WE REACH AGREEMENT ON DECLARATION, AS I SAID EARLIER, THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE ROAD. IT IS ANOTHER STEPPING STONE BEYOND WHICH ONE STILL HAS TO MOVE INTO OTHER ISSUES AND PERHAPS OTHER FORMS FOR NEGOTIATIONS. SO THERE IS GOING TO BE A ROLE FOR US TO PLAY EVEN AFTER AGREEMENT ON THE DECLARATION. I AM SIMPLY NOT IN A POSITION TO PREDICT WHEN THAT'S GOING TO BE ACHIEVED BUT OUR INTENTION IS TO KEEP WORKING HARD TO ACHIEVE THIS AS SOON AS THE REMAINING DIFFERENCES IN THE TEXT CAN BE RESOLVED. WHETHER THAT IS A MATTER OF DAYS, WEEKS, OR MORE I THINK IT IS JUST NOT FRUITFUL TO TRY TO SPECULATE AT THIS POINT.

QUESTION: AMBASSADOR ATHERTON, THIS TIME DID YOU CARRY ONLY THE ANSWER OF MR. BEGIN ON SADAT'S MESSAGE OR YOU ARE CARRYING ALSO ISRAELI PROPOSALS ON WHICH YOU ARE GOING TO RECEIVE EGYPTIAN COMMENT?

ANSWER: NO, I'M BRINGING THE RESPONSE FROM PRIME MINISTER BEGIN TO PRESIDENT SADAT, WHICH I WILL DELIVER WHEN I SEE THE PRESIDENT AT 6:00. THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE, I CONVEYED CERTAIN ADDITIONAL ISRAELI PROPOSALS WITH REGARD TO THE TEXT OF THE DECLARATION. THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN REFLECTING ON THOSE AND UNTIL THERE IS A RESPONSE TO THESE, THERE IS NOTHING FOR THE ISRAELIS TO REACT TO. WE ARE STILL DISCUSSING THESE. I DISCUSSED THIS IN MY MEETING WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER THIS AFTERNOON. I PRESUME IT WILL BE TOUCHED UPON ALSO IN MY MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SADAT AND THEN I'M PREPARED TO CONVEY A RESPONSE TO THAT AT ANY TIME THEY ARE READY.

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QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: THERE HASN'T BEEN A FORMAL RESPONSE. WHEN I PRESENTED THEM I WAS GIVEN SOME INITIAL ORAL REACTIONS AND THESE I HAVE CONVEYED. BUT WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION YET WHERE THERE IS A SORT OF FORMAL COUNTER PROPOSAL. AND, ANYWAY, THIS TIME IT IS A COUNTER-COUNTER-COUNTER-PROPOSAL. BUT, THAT'S NOT UNUSUAL BECAUSE SOME TIMES THERE IS NEED FOR FURTHER CLARIFICATION, FURTHER ORAL EXPLORATION BEFORE WORD CAN BE PUT ON PAPER. SO, I WOULD NOT ATTACH ANY SIGNIFICANCE TO THAT.

QUESTION: THESE MESSAGES WERE CONNECTED WITH THIS?

ANSWER: WELL, THAT GETS INTO THE QUESTION WHICH I THINK I JUST CAN'T GET INTO, THE SUBSTANCE OF MESSAGES BETWEEN THE TWO CHIEFS OF STATE.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: WELL, OUR POSITION WAS MADE VERY CLEAR AND I THINK THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAS MADE ITS POSITION EQUALLY CLEAR. I THINK WE BOTH UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S POSITION SO I WOULDN'T DESCRIBE IT AS A MISUNDERSTANDING BUT I THINK THERE ARE CLEARLY DIFFERENCES IN OUR POSITION AND THE ISRAELI POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF THE APPLICABILITY OF RESOLUTION 242 TO ALL FRONTS. REMEMBER THAT IN THE STATEMENT WHICH WE ISSUED AT THE END OF PRESIDENT SADAT'S LAST VISIT TO WASHINGTON WE USED THE PHRASE RESOLUTION 242 ON ALL FRONTS. THAT'S BEEN OUR POSITION.

QUESTION: WHICH ARE GOLAN, WEST BANK, GAZA AND SINAI.

ANSWER: THAT'S RIGHT.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE).

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ANSWER: I SUPPOSE YOU'LL COME AT THIS FROM EVERY DIRECTION AND I'M AFRAID I'M JUST NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO REALLY EVEN TO BEGIN TO

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INRE-00 INR-10 USIE-00 /050 W
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O 071907Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6410

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FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

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COMMENT ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE LETTERS.

QUESTION: LAST QUESTION ABOUT THE LETTERS, NOT ABOUT SUBSTANCE, BUT ARE THEY ACTUALLY LETTERS OR ARE THESE VERBAL MESSAGES?

ANSWER: NO, THEY ARE IN THE FORM OF LETTERS.

QUESTION: THEY ARE.

ANSWER: THEY'RE LETTERS.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: NO, I REALLY THINK IT'S PROBABLY BETTER TO LET KING HUSSEIN SPEAK FOR HIMSELF ON THIS. HE HAS MADE A NUMBER OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS RECENTLY AND I REALLY WOULDN'T WANT TO TRY TO EVEN IN A BACKGROUND SESSION TRY TO SPEAK FOR JORDAN. I HAD A VERY GOOD MEETING WITH KING HUSSEIN. I BROUGHT HIM UP TO DATE ON THE STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS AND HEARD HIS VIEWS ON THIS. BUT I REALLY THINK AS FAR AS HIS VIEWS GO, I'D BETTER LEAVE IT TO HIM OR HIS SPOKESMAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO ELABORATE.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: THERE WAS A CABINET DECISION A WEEK AGO SUNDAY WHICH REPRESENTED THE LATEST POSITION. THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE SINCE THEN BUT THAT IN ITSELF, AS I THINK IS CLEAR FROM SOME OF THE EXPLANATIONS OF IT WHICH HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY COME OUT, DID INVOLVE SOME CHANGE IN THE SENSE OF IMPOSING CERTAIN LIMITATIONS WHICH WERE NOT PREVIOUSLY THERE ON NEW SETTLEMENTS.

QUESTION: MR. ATHERTON, AFTER TWO WEEKS OF BEING IN CONTACT WITH BOTH SIDES, ARE YOU MORE OPTIMISTIC NOW OF THE RESUMPTION OF DIRECT TALKS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES BY THE END OF THIS MONTH AS SOMEONE IN JERUSALEM PUT IT?

ANSWER: I THINK THAT STILL IS AN OPEN QUESTION. I THINK QUITE HONESTLY IT'S (INAUDIBLE) TO TRY TO MAKE A PREDICTION ABOUT WHEN THAT MIGHT HAPPEN.

QUESTION: MR. ATHERTON, YOU CHARACTERIZED MR. BEGIN'S, THE PURPOSE FOR MR. BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON AS BRINGING BOTH SIDES UP TO DATE ON OUR POSITION. THERE'S A WIDESPREAD EXPECTATION HERE THAT THE UNITED STATES IS GOING TO APPLY SOME PRESSURE TO ISRAEL TO CHANGE ITS BARGAINING STANCE. WOULD YOU EXPECT THAT TO OCCUR AND WHAT SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS DO YOU THINK ARE GOING TO BE DISCUSSED WITH THE ISRAELIS IN WASHINGTON?

ANSWER: WELL, I THINK THE MAIN SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS ARE THE ONES I INDICATED IN MY OPENING REMARKS. THE QUESTION OF PRESSURE I WENT THROUGH THE LAST TIME WE HAD THESE SESSIONS AND TRIED TO EXPLAIN THAT THAT'S NOT A VERY DIPLOMATIC WORD AND I'M A DIPLOMAT. THE POINT IS WE ARE PLAYING A ROLE IN WHICH WE TRY TO BRING THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POSITIONS TOGETHER AND SOMETIMES WE INJECT OUR VIEWS WHEN WE THINK THEY WILL BE HELPFUL. WE HAVE NOT HESITATED TO INDICATE WHERE WE THINK THAT THE POSITION OF ONE SIDE IS MORE HELPFUL OR LESS HELPFUL, IN TERMS OF MOVING TOWARDS COMMON AGREEMENT. IT'S A PROCESS OF A DIALOGUE, AND INTENSIVE DIALOGUE, AND IT PRODUCES DEBATE AND, SOMETIMES INTENSIVE DEBATE, IN PUBLIC OPINION AND IN THE BODY POLITIC OF THE COUNTRY CONCERNED. I DON'T THINK ANYONE NEEDS ME TO TELL THEM THAT THERE'S A LOT OF DIALOGUE AND DEBATE GOING ON IN THE ISRAELI BODY POLITIC AT THIS TIME ABOUT SOME OF THESE VERY ISSUES. AND I THINK THAT IS THE SIGNIFICANT THING THAT ONE SHOULD FOCUS ON, JUST AS AT OTHER STAGES OF THE NEGOTIATION THERE HAS BEEN EQUALLY INTENSIVE DIALOGUE AND DEBATE ON SOME OF THE OTHER ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. THIS IS A PROCESS THAT GOES ON IN THE BODY POLITIC OF ALL THOSE CONCERNED AND I WOULD REALLY PREFER TO CHARACTERIZE IT THAT WAY RATHER THAN TALK IN TERMS OF WHAT PEOPLE USUALLY MEAN, AT LEAST, WHEN THEY SPEAK OF PRESSURES.

QUESTION: TO USE YOUR TERMS FOR A MINUTE THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS SPARKED A LOT OF THIS DEBATE IN ISRAEL WITHIN ITS BODY POLITIC. WOULD YOU EXPECT MORE OF THAT AFTER MR. BEGIN'S VISIT?

ANSWER: I THINK, QUITE HONESTLY, THAT THE SITUATION HAS SPARKED DEBATE; THE VISIT OF PRESIDENT SADAT ITSELF CREATED A WHOLE NEW CONTEXT FOR THE DISCUSSION AND LED TO A DEBATE ABOUT SOME LONG ACCEPTED PREMISES AND ASSUMPTIONS IN ISRAEL. THE DEBATE REALLY STARTED WITH THAT ACT I THINK AS MUCH AS ANYTHING ELSE. WE CLEARLY HAVE TRIED TO ENCOURAGE RETHINKING OF POSITIONS WHERE WE THINK THAT THEY NEED TO BE RETHOUGHT, JUST AS WE, LET ME PUT THIS IN PERSPECTIVE, WE BEGAN VERY EARLY IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S ADMINISTRATION TO ENCOURAGE RETHINKING OF POSITIONS AND ONE AREA WHERE WE ENCOURAGED IT WAS WITH REGARD TO THE NATURE OF PEACE WHERE WE PUT A LOT OF EMPHASIS IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF THIS ADMINISTRATION ON THE IDEA THAT PART OF THE PEACE SETTLEMENT EQUATION WHICH IS SET IN TERMS OF PRINCIPLES IN RESOLUTION 242 WAS THE RECOGNITION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND THAT PEACE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHOULD BE MORE THAN JUST THE END OF BELLIGERENCY, THAT IT SHOULD

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INR-10 INRE-00 USIE-00 /050 W
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FOR GEORGE SHERMAN

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INVOLVE POSITIVE ASPECTS WITH POSITIVE CONTENT. THAT SPARKED
QUITE A DEBATE ON THE ARAB SIDE AND THE RESULT HAS BEEN QUITE
A LAST OF RETHINKING, AND IN THE CASE OF PRESIDENT SADAT'S APPROACH
IN HIS VISIT TO ISRAEL, I THINK SOME VERY SHARP AND VERY
SIGNIFICANT AND VERY POSITIVE EVOLUTION OF POSITION. SO I'M
SPEAKING OF SOMETHING, OF THAT KIND OF A PROCESS OF WHICH WE'RE
STILL IN THE MIDDLE.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: WELL, I'VE SAID THAT ON THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM THAT
REMAINS ONE OF THE UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND IT'S OBVIOUSLY GOING TO
BE, THEREFORE, ONE OF THE ISSUES THAT IS GOING TO BE UNDER DISCUSSION
DURING THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT.

QUESTION: WHEN YOU SAY YOU BROUGHT KING HUSSEIN UP TO DATE ON
THE NEGOTIATIONS, HOW COMPLETELY WAS THAT DONE? DID YOU TELL HIM
THE CONTENTS OF THE MESSAGES YOU'RE BRINGING BACK?

ANSWER: NO, NOT THE CONTENTS OF THE PERSONAL MESSAGES. NO.
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I TALKED TO HIM ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE DECLARATIONS OF PRINCIPLES, HOW WE ENVISAGE THE PROCESS PROCEEDING; BEYOND THAT TOWARDS A BROADENING OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE PARTICIPATION. I TALKED ABOUT THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, NOT ABOUT THE PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE TWO HEADS OF STATE.

QUESTION: YOU'VE SEEN THIS CORRESPONDENCE, MR. ATHERTON?

ANSWER: YES, WELL, WE'VE BEEN THE CONVEYOR, YES.

QUESTION: YOU SAID ON YOUR FIRST VISIT TO CAIRO WHAT YOU SAID TODAY THAT AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME THE UNITED STATES WOULD COME FORWARD WITH VARIOUS PROPOSALS. DO YOU THINK THIS APPROPRIATE TIME HAS COME OR IS POSSIBLY COMING?

ANSWER: WE CERTAINLY DON'T FEEL THAT WE'VE REACHED THAT POINT. AS TO THE FUTURE, I LEAVE THE FUTURE TO TAKE CARE OF ITSELF. I DON'T WANT TO SPECULATE ABOUT WHEN IT MIGHT COME, BUT I WILL ONLY REITERATE WHAT I SAID. THAT WE CERTAINLY KEEP IN MIND, WE HAVE TO MAKE A JUDGMENT OF WHEN WE THINK IT WILL PRODUCE EFFECTIVE RESULTS. THERE'S NO SENSE OF MAKING PROPOSALS AND INITIATIVES UNTIL ONE'S JUDGMENT IS THAT THE TIME IS RIGHT. WE'RE LOOKING AT IT IN THAT CONTEXT.

QUESTION: HAS THERE BEEN ANY REALLY SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS FOR A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS OR ARE YOU MARKING TIME UNTIL THE BEGIN VISIT?

ANSWER: NO, I WOULD NOT SAY MARKING TIME. I WOULD CERTAINLY SAY IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN THAT. I HAVE BEEN VERY CAREFUL NOT TO TRY TO CHARACTERIZE EACH STEP OF THE PROCESS OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS. BUT I SAID, A LITTLE EARLIER, I THINK WE HAVE NARROWED SOME LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE DIFFERENCES IN TEXTUAL TERMS. AND THAT, I GUESS, I WOULD HAVE TO CHARACTERIZE AS A SORT OF PROGRESS. BUT I DON'T WANT TO SAY THAT THERE ISN'T A LOT OF HARD WORK STILL AHEAD, THERE IS.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE?

QUESTION: BOTH, ON THE PALESTINIAN AND 242... ARE THEY ANY CLOSER NOW... (INAUDIBLE)...?

ANSWER: THE PALESTINIAN CONCEPTS, I WOULD SAY, ARE ABOUT WHERE THEY WERE. I CAN'T SAY THAT THERE'S BEEN ANY SIGNIFICANT CLOSING

OF THE GAPS ON THAT. ON LANGUAGES RELATING TO WITHDRAWAL, IT'S STILL NOT TOTALLY RESOLVED BUT I THINK THERE'S BEEN SOME, I WOULD PUT THAT IN THE CATEGORY OF WHERE I THINK THERE HAS BEEN SOME NARROWING OF THE GAPS.

QUESTION: COULD YOU CHARACTERIZE FOR US, YOUR ASSESSMENT OF MR. CARTER'S DETERMINATION?

ANSWER: I'M TRYING TO THINK OF SOME SYNONYMS FOR DETERMINATION BUT MY IMPRESSION IS EVERYTHING HE HAS SAID AND DONE ATTESTS TO THAT, HE HAS FOR THE FIRST TIME APPOINTED A SPECIAL AMBASSADOR TO DEAL WITH THIS PROBLEM ON A CONTINUING BASIS. HE HAS HAD FREQUENT MEETINGS WITH THE CHIEFS OF STATE OF THE GOVERNMENTS CONCERNED, INCLUDING THE ONE THAT IS COMING UP NEXT WEEK WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. I THINK IT'S AN ALL-OUT DETERMINATION TO KEEP THE PROCESS GOING, TO DO ALL WE CAN TO MAKE IT SUCCEED.

QUESTION: IS HE PREPARED ALSO TO SEE IT FALL APART IF THAT SHOULD BE THE RESULT?

ANSWER: I DON'T THINK ANY OF US IS ASSUMING IT'S GOING TO FALL

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APART. WE THINK THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE FOR IT TO BE ALLOWED TO FALL APART.

QUESTION: THAT'S WHAT I WAS GETTING AT. IS HE DETERMINED NOT TO ALLOW IT TO FALL APART?

ANSWER: I DON'T KNOW THAT I CAN ADD TO WHAT I'VE SAID. ONE HAS TO JUDGE, OBVIOUSLY BY DEEDS AND BY RESULTS, AND, SO FAR, I THINK THE EVIDENCE IS CLEAR THAT THE EFFORT IS A VERY DETERMINED ONE. WE'RE NOT ALL POWERFUL IN THE WORLD, AND SOME PEOPLE THINK WE ARE OR THAT WE ONCE WERE, AND WE CAN'T ALWAYS, BY OURSELVES, WITH THE BEST WILL AND THE BEST EFFORT IN THE WORLD, ACHIEVE WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE. BUT, ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT WITH EVERY EFFORT WE CAN MAKE WE'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TO WORK AT THIS PROBLEM.

QUESTION: MR. ATHERTON, YOU SAID, WELL, YOU MENTIONED IT AGAIN NOW, BUT IT WAS MENTIONED RATHER FORCEFULLY AFTER PRESIDENT SADAT'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON, THAT THE U.S. ROLE WOULD BECOME MORE ACTIVE. AND YOU'RE SAYING NOW THAT IT HAS BECOME LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MORE ... HOW HAS IT CAHNGED, REALLY, IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS? HOW HAS THE ROLE CHANGED?

ANSWER: WELL, THE MAIN THING IS THE CONTINUITY OF OUR ENGAGEMENT. I SAID EARLIER THAT I THINK THAT THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT NEW FACTOR THAT OUR EFFORTS IN THE DIPLOMATIC PROCESS OVERALL I WOULD DESCRIBE NOW AS ONE OF CONTINUITY RATHER THAN SIMPLY BEING EPISODIC. AND I AM THE SYMBOL OF THIS, IF YOU WILL, WITH THE APPOINTMENT OF ME TO THE FULL TIME JOB OF DEALING WITH THIS PROBLEM IS ONE RESPECT IN WHICH IT CERTAINLY HAS CHANGED.

QUESTION: BUT THE EGYPTIANS HAVE BEEN RATHER CRITICAL OF THE POST-MAN ROLE WHICH THEY SAW IT HAS BEING, AT LEAST CERTAINLY BEFORE WASHINGTON, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT IT NOW, BUT IT DOES NOT APPEAR ON THE SURFACE TO HAVE CHANGED THAT MUCH, BECAUSE YOU SIMPLY HAVE NOT PROVIDED YOUR BLUEPRINT.

ANSWER: I WOULD SUPPOSE THAT THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A NEGOTIATOR OF WHOM SOMEONE HAS NOT BEEN CRITICAL AT ONE POINT OR ANOTHER. BUT I MUST SAY THAT IN MY TALKS WITH THE GOVERNMENTS OF BOTH EGYPT AND ISRAEL I'VE FOUND THEM REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZING THAT THEY WELCOME ME, MY ROLE AND MY MISSION AND THEY VERY MUCH WANT ME TO CONTINUE.

QUESTION: MR. ATHERTON, YOU MENTIONED THAT IN PARALLEL TO YOUR ROLE IN THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES YOU HAD BEEN WORKING TOWARDS AGREEMENT ON ITEM TWO OF THE AGENDA... HAVE YOU MADE PROGRESS ON THIS?

ANSWER: I SAID THAT WE HAD SOME EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS. I WOULDN'T WANT TO CHARACTERIZE IT AS ANYTHING AS FORMAL AS WORKING TOWARDS AGREEMENT YET. BUT WE SEE THAT AS FLOWING IN EFFECT FROM THAT PRINCIPLE WHICH WILL DEAL WITH THE

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PALESTINIAN QUESTION AS MAKING IT MORE SPECIFIC AND MORE CONCRETE. IT'S ALMOST INEVITABLE WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT PRINCIPLES RELATING TO THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE TO BEGIN TO TALK ABOUT WHAT COMES NEXT AFTER THE DECLARATION ON THAT SUBJECT AND THAT BRINGS YOU AUTOMATICALLY INTO THE PRELIMINARY EXPLORATORY DISCUSSION OF THE NEXT ITEM ON THE AGENDA.

QUESTION: IS THERE ANY POSSIBILITY THAT THE POLITICAL OR THE MILITARY COMMISSIONS CAN BE RESUMED SOON BEFORE YOUR RETURN TO WASHINGTON?

ANSWER: AS OF NOW, THERE IS NO DECISION TO DO SO AND I SIMPLY CAN'T PREDICT WHAT MAY INVOLVE IN THE THINKING AND THE JUDGMENTS OF THE EGYPTIAN AND ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS WITH THIS RESPECT IN THAT PERIOD BUT BOTH HAVE SAID THAT THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE IS TO GET BACK INTO THE REGULAR NEGOTIATING FORUMS AND FORMATS THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED. AND SO, CERTAINLY IN PRINCIPLE, THIS IS A COMMON UNDERSTANDING. BUT AS TO WHEN IT WILL HAPPEN AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES I JUST CAN'T PREDICT.

QUESTION: DO YOU SEE ANY GREATER POSSIBILITY OF A FACE-TO-FACE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT SADAT AND MR. BEGIN? HAS YOUR EXPECTATION OF SUCH AN EVENT, INCREASED IN THE LAST WEEK OR SO?

ANSWER: NO, I DON'T. I THINK IT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT IS UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION.

QUESTION: WHEN YOU SAY YOU HAVE THE FEELING THAT BOTH SIDES WELCOME YOU, DO YOU SEE SOME PLACE ALSO DOWN THE ROAD WHERE BOTH SIDES MIGHT WELCOME AN AMERICAN FORMULA, ONE HESITATES TO SAY, "IMPOSED" TO YOU A FORMULA TO GET EVERYBODY OFF THE HOOK.

ANSWER: ONE CERTAINLY DOES HESITATE TO SAY THAT. (LAUGHTER)

QUESTION: DO YOU SEE SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

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ANSWER: WELL, LOOK. YES, I CAN SEE IT, AND IT'S HAPPENED IN THE PAST AND SOMETIMES, VERY OFTEN, PARTIES TO A NEGOTIATION FIND IT

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EASIER TO REACT TO A THIRD PARTY'S SUGGESTIONS THAN TO EACH OTHER'S
AND IN THE PAST CERTAINLY BOTH WELCOMED OUR ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE
IMPASSE OVER THE AGENDA FOR THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE.

QUESTION: HOW MUCH LONGER CAN THIS PROCESS AT THIS PACE CONTINUE
WITHOUT CHANGING INTO, EVOLVING INTO ANOTHER FORM, TO REPHRASE IT?

ANSWER: I TELL YOU, THERE ARE DAYS WHEN I ASK MYSELF THAT, I DON'T
KNOW; I DON'T TRY TO PREDICT.

QUESTIIN: THE QUESITON OF MILITARY AID BY THE UNITED STATES TO
SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT AND ISRAEL, HAS IT EVER BEEN DISCUSSED
DURING YOUR TALKS IN THE TWO COUNTRIES?

ANSWER: NO. MY TALKS HAVE REALLY BEEN FOCUSED ON NEGOTIATIONS ON
THE DECLARATION AND THINGS THAT FLOW FROM THAT.

QUESITON: BEFORE PRESIDENT SADAT'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON YOU TOLD US
NOT TO EXPECT ANY DRAMATIC BREAKTHROUGHS. WOULD YOU SAY THE SAME
THING ABOUT THE BEGIN VISIT?

ANSWER: YES, I THINK THAT'S FAIR TO SAY. I DON'T THINK THAT ANY
ONE STEP IS GOING TO SUDDENLY EQUATE TO A MIRACULOUS AND DRAMATIC
BREAKTHROUGH. I THINK ONE PROGRESSES INCREMENTALLY AND I VIEW MR.
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BEGIN'S AS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT NEXT STEP BUT THERE WILL OBVIOUSLY
BE A NEED TO FOLLOW ON AFTER THAT.

QUESTION: (INAUDIBLE)

ANSWER: NO, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT COMPLETING THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AS THE BASIS FOR BROADENING THE FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS AND WHEN WE GET TO THAT POINT THEN I'M SURE ALL CONCERNED WILL WANT TO CONSIDER HOW THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS WILL CONTINUE.

QUESTION: THANK YOU, MR. ATHERTON.
RUGH

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Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS CONFERENCES, MINISTERIAL VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978CAIRO07440
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780103-0225
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From: CAIRO
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Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 17
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3422041
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ATHERTON BACKGROUNDER FOLLOWING IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF AMBASSADOR ATHERTON'S BACKGROUNDER FOR THE PRESS, HELD IN CAIRO ON MARCH 6.
TAGS: SOPN, OVIP, (ATHERTON, ALFRED L JR)
To: JERUSALEM
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbcr//SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/02d932cc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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Declassified/Released
US Department of State
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Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014